

Policy Memo on Senate Bill 17

03/09/2024

Ban on DEI Offices at Texas Public Universities

Executive Summary

This policy memo analyzes the impact of Senate Bill 17(SB 17) on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts within colleges and universities in Texas. Senate Bill 17, signed June 17, 2023 which went into effect January 1, 2024, prohibits the existence of DEI offices, it restricts diversity initiatives, and proposes consequences for employees involved in DEI which leads to significant challenges in Texas higher education. A survey conducted among college students indicated a majority opposition to SB 17 due to the concern of it having a negative impacts on diversity on campuses. To address these concerns, It is recommended to support alternative DEI initiatives from private, alternative organizations and empowering student- led initiatives instead of school funded ones and SB 17 remaining intact. By supporting alternative DEI initiatives, Texas colleges and universities can navigate challenges created by SB17 while still prioritizing DEI on their campuses.

SB 17 imposes many restrictions on DEI initiatives within Texas public higher education institutions.

- SB 17 prohibits the existence of DEI offices, diversity trainings, diversity statements from hiring departments, and mandates statements affirming viewpoint diversity (Creighton, 2023)
- The legislation requires yearly reports affirming compliance with its provisions, with potential loss of state funding consequently for non-compliance (Creighton, 2023)

The application of SB 17 has caused significant changes in Texas colleges and universities. For example:

- The Multicultural Engagement Center (MEC) at the University of Texas at Austin has closed (Quant, 2024)
- The Black Cultural Center has closed at Texas Tech University (Rosiles, 2023)

Three things can be done to address this bill.

1. Let the bill remain intact and do nothing
2. Repeal the bill and allow government regulated DEI initiatives back into Texas higher education institutions
3. Allow SB 17 to remain intact and also rely on alternative private funded initiatives from external organization and empower student-led DEI organizations and initiatives instead of government funded and mandated ones.

It is recommended to allow SB17 to remain intact and support alternative DEI initiatives as the best option for improving the bill. By creating partnerships with external organizations and letting on campus DEI initiatives be student led, Texas education institutions can assess the effects of SB 17 while complying with the bill.

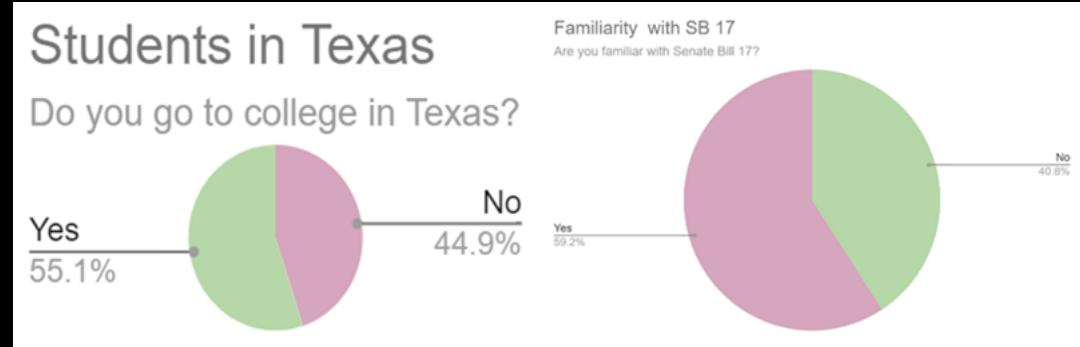
To gauge public opinion among college students regarding SB 17, a survey was conducted among them both in and outside of Texas. To do this, I created a survey via Google Forms and posted this survey on forums used only by college students on YikYak. The purpose of this survey was to assess participants' familiarity with SB 17, their understanding of the effects of this bill, and their support or opposition towards the bill as well as its perceptions of its potential impact and public reception. This survey recorded demographic information, opinions and familiarity of the bill, an impact assessment and a public perception assessment.

Conclusion:

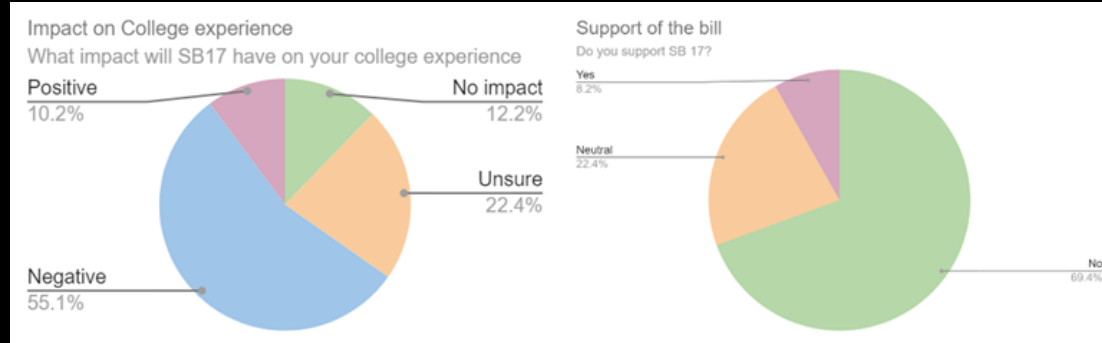
In conclusion, SB 17 creates challenges to DEI efforts in Texas colleges and universities. By supporting DEI initiatives through an alternative, external route, Texas higher education institutions can navigate the effects of SB 17 while prioritizing DEI on their campuses

Participants were given a brief summary of SB 17 and then answered a series of questions

Majority of survey participants went to colleges and universities in Texas and were familiar with the bill



Similarly Majority believed that SB 17 would have a negative impact on their college experience and did not support the bill



References

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